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Witches, Tea Plantations, and Lives of Migrant Laborers in India: Tempest in a Teapot. By Soma Chaudhuri. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2013. Pp. xvi+191. \$80.00.

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How to explain witchcraft accusations and witch hunts in 21st-century India? Why is it that traditions generally considered “premodern” continue to be practiced today, and what purpose do they serve? Soma Chaudhuri’s *Witches, Tea Plantations, and Lives of Migrant Laborers in India* seeks answers to these difficult questions through a case study of witch hunts among tea plantation workers in West Bengal, India. Chaudhuri’s research deals with a particular group of people, indigenous (*adivasi*) workers who live and work in isolated tea plantations in the district of Jalpaiguri, West Bengal. The book is based on rich qualitative fieldwork conducted between 2005 and 2007 and a combination of methods and data (archives, interviewing, and ethnography).

Research on witchcraft is bread and butter for anthropologists and has recently gained popularity among historians, but the phenomenon has rarely been of interest to sociologists. In this respect, Chaudhuri’s work is a welcome exception. It engages explicitly with sociological concepts in setting the phenomenon in a broader framework of waged worker versus management versus labor union. The key concept through which Chaudhuri explains witchcraft accusations is alienation in the context of labor relations. Thus, unlike existing research, which has highlighted the importance of gender conflicts and disputes over land ownership as the causes for witchcraft accusations, Chaudhuri convincingly shows the limitations of such explanations in the case of *adivasi* workers in Jalpaiguri’s tea plantations. Disputes over land do not explain why *adivasi* workers resort to witch hunts, because they do not own agricultural land. Instead, Chaudhuri argues that witchcraft accusations and the witch hunts that follow are individual responses to the sense of alienation that the workers experience in the wage economy of the tea plantation. Instead of protesting against their oppressors, the plantation owners and union leaders, *adivasi* workers resort to blaming the weakest members of their community, mostly women, for witchcraft. Witch hunts are then best understood, according to Chaudhuri, as means by which communities deal with alienation, exploitative wage labor relations, and sudden illnesses and death. Women are targeted as a result of their oppressed status in the community.

Chaudhuri argues that the *adivasi* workers are not only alienated from the product of their labor in the way Karl Marx intended, but also from the

land they occupy and from their local community. An important dimension in this particular case is that the adivasi workers continue to feel alien in Jalpaiguri. Chaudhuri explains that the forced migrations of adivasi workers during British colonial rule continue to determine the status of these workers still today. In fact, Chaudhuri decides to call the adivasi workers migrant laborers because of the workers' continuing sense of alienation in Jalpaiguri and persisting attachment to their homelands in other parts of India. This choice is telling, in that it draws our attention to how the experience of migration can survive generations if sustained by discrimination and lack of possibilities for social mobility. It also points to the persistence of colonial legacies. The strict class hierarchy of the tea plantations is an invention of colonial rules and in this hierarchy the adivasi workers hold the lowest position.

Having said that, I am not totally convinced that calling these workers migrants was the correct choice. The book does not give clear empirical examples that would justify this choice. It seems that the historical continuities of colonialism are a much more important backdrop to understanding the phenomenon of witch hunts—a fact not fully explored, in my mind, when using the concept of the migrant laborer. In fact, I would have welcomed a discussion in which postcolonial theories were conceptually integrated into the analysis. Another important dimension, which I feel was not fully conceptualized in the book, is the gendered nature of the witch hunts. Although witchcraft accusations and the hunts that follow target mainly women, and the empirical cases discussed in the book concern women, the gendered nature of this phenomenon is somewhat overlooked in some parts of the analysis. This omission is especially apparent in a chapter that seeks to categorize witch hunts into different types and that speaks generically of accusers and accused, overlooking the deeply gendered nature of the phenomenon.

Despite these small shortcomings, Chaudhuri's book is an engaging analysis of contemporary forms of witchcraft accusations and witch hunts. Not only does it go through interesting bodies of literatures and rich empirical data, it also offers an important discussion on the work of local NGOs campaigning against witch hunts. Antiwitch campaigns provide a needed reminder that although not much has changed in the condition of adivasi plantation workers in the last 150 years, things are likely to be changing in the future.

Chaudhuri's book will be of interest to a wide range of scholars who do research on witch hunts and witchcraft accusations not only in India, but globally. It is also an interesting book for any sociologist concerned with labor relations and labor conflicts in postcolonial contexts.